Research Proposal of the Thesis entitled

Investigating Models of Modernity in North-East India: Neo-perspectives in Environmental Humanities

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Introduction

Ecocriticism delves deeper than the basic concepts of ecology and environment, examining humans' relationship with nature. Literature and the environment share a close bond, as ecocriticism explores not only the description of the environment but also the impact of climate change, globalisation, urbanisation, and modernisation.

The beginning of Ecocriticism in the UK can be traced back to the British Romanticism of the 1790s. A critic named Jonathan Bate is regarded as the pioneer of this field in the UK. William Rueckert coined the term 'Eco-criticism' in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism*"* (Rueckert 1978). The professor of American literature, Laurence Buell, examines the tropes and myths that shape our environmental imagination. He stated that pastoralism is a widely used concept in Western environmental thinking. In the 1970s, the field of environmental ethics was established by Richard Routley and Arne Naess. Environmental ethics aims to tackle ecological problems and investigate ethical and unethical conduct that affects the environment.

The first initiative in India towards ecocriticism was taken by South Indian writer Nirmala Selvamony. He introduced the course 'Tamil Poetics' at (Madras Christian College) in 1980, which he later renamed as Eco Literature in 1996. Conferences were then organised to focus on the representation of environmental issues in literature. Literature have shared a close relationship with nature. The natural and social worlds are closely intertwined, and this relationship is gaining importance in various departments of study. Modern machinery has brought about significant change in the world, leading to remarkable technological and scientific advancements. However, people often overlook the impact of disrupting the balance between humans and nature, which can lead to the loss of natural and cultural heritage.

The industrial revolution is the process through which the farm-based economy is transformed into manufacturing. The process of making a society where people work easily with machines. It started in 1750 in Britain and then spread to other countries after the 18th century. Focused on more production of goods and services. Produce more goods with less human labour. It goes with improvements in technology and infrastructure, urbanisation and economic growth. And also improving higher living standards. It has come with a lot of exploitative labour practices, high levels of pollution, carbon emissions and government policy (Britannica).

Ecocriticism, colonisation, industrialisation, and capitalism are interconnected themes that can be examined through the lens of English literature. Ecocriticism, as a literary theory, explores how literature reflects and shapes our relationship with the natural world. When combined with the historical contexts of colonisation, industrialisation, and capitalism, it provides a critical framework to understand how these forces have impacted the environment and human societies.

Northeast popularly known as including 'seven sisters' named "Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam," this discussion is on the coinciding relationship between man and nature which has great momentum in this region. The Northeast 'region' of India is known as the 'Wild East'. It is home to many tribal communities. These communities have been able to maintain their way of life because of the thick forests, hills, and the Himalayan mountain range that act as a barrier. Each tribe differs from the others in terms of customs, traditions, language, costumes, and festivals. These states hold special importance because of their cultural and historical uniqueness.

Introduction to the Author and the Works

The main goal of this research is to explore ecological awareness in fiction written by North-eastern authors, focusing specifically on Mamang Dai and Easterine Kire.

Mamang Dai, a short-story writer, was born in Arunachal Pradesh. Her book, *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), is a collection of stories that talk about the *Adi tribes*, spread across 'Arunachal Pradesh'. The stories revolve around a family over a few generations. The significance of upholding equilibrium between the realms of humanity and spirituality is highlighted in the text. The author stresses the negative consequences that result from neglecting certain customs and how individuals suffer retribution from deities or the environment due to their lack of knowledge.

Another work of Mamang Dai is the novel taken for this study *The Black Hill* (2014) published in 2014. *The Black Hill* is a fictional novel that recorded historical events. The story is set in north-eastern India and is famous for its thoughtful and reflective tone. In her novel, Mamang Dai portrays how tribes engage in constant feuds over territories. However, they become protective and possessive when they notice colonisers starting to invade their land. The book also tells a love story between Kajinsha and Gimur, and the efforts of French Priest Father Krick to present the colonial circumstances in Arunachal Pradesh. The book creates a feeling of yearning, a longing for the past, and an appreciation for nature. These components contribute to the overall emotional experience of the story.

Easterine Kire is a writer from Northeast India who is featured in this study. Her novel, *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), tells the story of Mose, a man from Nagaland. It explores the social and political history of the region and shows how conflict and violence affect Mose's life and the lives of others. Kire blends personal stories with shared experiences, highlighting how violence, displacement, and loss of culture impact individuals and communities. Critics praise Kire for making historical events relatable by connecting them to daily lives. This approach offers a fresh

perspective compared to traditional history books. The novel focuses on themes like resilience, loss, and identity during tough times. It highlights the struggles of the Naga people for self-determination and discusses colonial history and political oppression. The book also emphasises the importance of cultural heritage. This work is important for indigenous literature, as it sheds light on the often-overlooked histories of Northeast India.

The next work of Kire is *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (Kire, 2018), the novel, which was published in 2018, is the very first Naga book in English. In this text, Kire locates her subjects like colonisation, and anti-colonial historiography through historical events and experiences of tribal people. As a result, the text becomes more of a postcolonial text the effect of conversion, and the slow death of indigenous people. Khonoma is just situated as a victim of political aggression from the beginning of the 1800s, from 1832-1900, she details the history of the Naga people. Attack of Britishers including occupying land, cutting down forests, levying taxes on them, and making them their labour. The Britishers constantly destroyed the ecology with their war and violence.

Literature Review

Many works have been done on Northeast Indian literature. Many works on Eco-criticism, Environment, Eco-feminism, Eco-poetics. It focuses on social, cultural, and tradition in literature, instead of focusing only on eco-criticism and nature, this research represents the relationship between environment and literature.

A literature review aims to review related literature and summarise previous research. It presents what is already known and avoids duplication, while critically evaluating the material. Examining previous research can provide insight into current issues and problems.

In a previous study conducted by Sarika Manwani titled “Contours of Ecological Consciousness in the Fiction of Northeast India” (2022), the role of nature and its inhabitants in Indian society was examined. This included a look at ancient texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads, as well as the theory of eco-criticism, the text “which explores the relationship between humans and their physical environment.” The study also delved into the philosophy of deep ecology and the development of ecofeminism, providing insight into the presence of supernatural elements in eco-poetics, various types of eco-criticism, the concept of ecocide, and the use of literary devices such as symbolism, narrative technique, figures of speech, and imagery by select writers.

Sandhya G. conducted a study on Amitav Ghosh's novels, titled “Eco-critical Reading of Amitav Ghosh's Novels” (2017). The study provides a thematic analysis of Ghosh's work and sheds light on the emergence of Indian English fiction. It highlights the dominant attitude of humans towards nature, which is centred on man's power over nature. The study also focuses on Ghosh's characters who have contributed to environmental destruction and lack intimacy with nature. The study advocates for biophilia and emphasizes the need to protect nature and develop a relationship with it from an “Oiko” perspective.

Kumari Shikha’s article title, “Eco-criticism in Indian Fiction” (2011), the researcher explains the long-standing relationship between environment and literature, which is evident in the works of writers from various cultures throughout history. India boasts a diverse range of ecosystems, the geography of the region spans from the north Himalayas to the southern highlands, and from the thriving Sunderbans in the east to the dry western lands. Nevertheless, these ecosystems have suffered adverse effects over the years due to the rise in human population and

greed. This reduction has also affected literature, and Shikha's study focuses on how environmental concerns have transformed Indian writing from admiration to devastation.

The researcher Purnanshu Dudhatra, in “An Environmental Concern in Select Indian English Novels across India in an Eco-critical Study” (2022), analyses a selection of novels from an eco-centric perspective in this research work. The focus is on the four waves of eco-criticism and their impact. Additionally, the opposing attitudes of anthropocentrism and biocentrism towards nature are explored, along with a brief discussion of Marxist environmentalism and ecofeminism.

This study by Sutariya Chirag “Ecocritical Study of *Moby Dick, The Old Man and The Sea Life of Pi* and *The Hungry Tide”* (2018), analyses literary works like *Moby Dick* (1851) and *Life of Pi* (2001) to emphasise the importance of understanding the whole natural environment, including all species. It shows that nature dominates humans and man's attempts to exploit it are futile. *Life of Pi* portrays nature as supportive and destructive, with love and pity overcoming the wild. The Hungry Tide explores the interconnectedness of all species in the natural environment.

Sarita Dubey’s study, “Ecofeminism and Quest for Identity in the Novels of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Shashi Deshpande” (2018), explores ecofeminism. This field looks at how feminism, the environment, and literature connect. It observes the ways women, animals, and nature are related to each other. By analysing selected novels, the study highlights the experiences of women from different backgrounds who face challenges like pollution and industrialisation. It raises important questions about ecofeminism, environmental ethics, identity, and patriarchal beliefs. The study also considers ideas from both Western and Indian eco-feminist thinkers.

This thesis by Kalyani Pricilla J. “Ecofeminist Perspective on Survival of Tribals in the Select Works of Mahashweta Devi” (2021) explores Mahashweta Devi’s works from an ecofeminist perspective. Devi’s writing represents the cruelty of women and the harmful effects of environmental degradation, particularly among underprivileged tribal communities. It stresses the urgent need for action to address the existing situation of environmental degradation. Devi also highlights the role of factors such as caste, class, and other aspects that shape tribal societies in modern India, and how these factors contribute to the exploitation of forests and the subjugation of tribal communities. The thesis analyses various forms of development that neglect the environment and their negative impact on tribal women and children.

This research paper is by Dharmesh Vavaiya “Ecocriticism from an Indian Perspective” (2021). It sheds light on the Indian viewpoint towards ecology, emphasising that it encompasses everything that exists in the environment - from what lies beneath and above the sun to what exists underwater and overwater. The paper delves into ecofeminism, highlighting the strong connection between women and the environment. It also presents a deep cultural and ecological analysis. Additionally, the author defines the position of the environment in India and explores various religions from an ecocritical perspective.

Jaidev Bishnoi's thesis, “Fiction of Development: A Study of Displacement, Disaster, and Dispossession in Selected Indian Novels” (2022), examines how modern Indian novels address the ecological crisis through themes such as displacement, disaster, and dispossession. Bishnoi analyses three novels: *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Animal's People* (2007), and *A Gift in Green* (2011). This thesis delves into complex contemporary issues, particularly development and ideological development in postcolonial India.

Plan of the study

Present research eco-critical reading of selected fiction of Easterine Kire and Mamang Dai represents eco-criticism through the lens of literature. Eco-critical literature describes the interconnection of environment and literature, Indian English novelists depict the local culture in their works. The people's identity and the relationship between humans and the environment are being blurred by ecological rules, which are challenging. The society's discourse has complex and layered meanings. It focuses on the themes of social, cultural, and tradition.

The books from Northeast India tell us about the different ways of life, language, and culture of the people there. A researcher wanted to learn more about this and how it relates to the whole world. The people there care a lot about nature and think it's important to keep it safe.

Eco-criticism has been addressed in a particular manner. Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* (2013), *Sky is My Father* (2018), Mamang Dai's *Legends of Pensam* (2006), and *The Black Hill* (2014) will give new insights into literature. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between man, nature, and society in the Indian context.

Objectives of the Study

To study the thematic concerns of eco-criticism in Northeast Indian English literature. To analyse how Northeast Indian English literature expresses the connection that exists between humans and the natural world is what people are referring to. To Study the impact of modernisation and globalisation through the works of northeast Indian writers. Explore the social and cultural context influencing eco-critical discourse in northeast Indian English literature.

Research Methodology

The information gathered will be from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will include certain works of northeast Indian English fiction. As for secondary sources, they will consist of critiques, articles, and interviews of the authors that have been published in a variety of publications and books. Reliable information from the internet will be utilized as a part of the secondary sources.

The research project will use primary sources like *Bitter Wormwood* (2013)*, Sky is My Father* (2018)*, The Legends of Pensam* (2006)*, and The Black Hill* (2014). The postcolonial and eco-critical aspects of each novel will be analysed sequentially, followed by a summary.

The descriptive approach has been utilised to investigate how these authors have depicted their thoughts on Eco-critical study by gathering information from chosen novels. These novels showcase certain locations in India and highlight the importance of incorporating an international or global perspective in the current methodology of the study.

Chapter Plan

Introduction: An Overview of Ecocriticism

In this chapter, the theory of Ecocriticism will be introduced. The connection between Literature and Environment, the emergence of Ecocriticism as a theory, and the types of Ecocritical analysis applied to literature will all be discussed by the researcher. The Researcher also sheds light on northeast Indian history, and the relationship of northeast India with nature as they are known as the ‘Wild East’.

Green Narratives: North-eastern Mythic Ecology

This chapter introduced the myths and legends in the ecocritical works of Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam, The Black Hill,* and Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood, Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remember*. Myth is a being or object that exists only in one's imagination or cannot be proven to exist. These works combine myths, religion, history, and Ecocritical concerns of the present day.

Ecocritical Liberation in Northeast Indian Postcolonial Discourse

In the chapter third chapter of the thesis researcher examines the postcolonial discourse with the works selected by two writers from the Northeast. It will represent the crisis in northeast India during colonialism. This chapter highlights the impact of colonialism on the indigenous population and the loss of their identity due to Christianity. The chapter portrays how the ecology was destroyed by the Britishers through war and violence in northeast India through the works of these selected two writers.

Ecocritical Insights into Northeast Indian Indigenous Crisis

In this chapter, the researcher will represent the ecological crisis through the works of selected writers for this study. Over time humans started crossing the boundaries and dominating nature with modernisation, urbanisation, globalisation, deforestation, and government projects. This human behaviour interacts with environmental crises like pollution, climate change, deforestation, etc. And they raised a global concern among the masses as well as literary writers.

Conclusion

The final chapter of the study will cover the hypotheses and their validation. Ecocriticism amalgamates ecology and theoretical concepts. The researcher will attempt to establish if literature

can positively create awareness about the environment, after examining the theories of critics and analysing the literary works of Mamang Dai and Easterine Kire.

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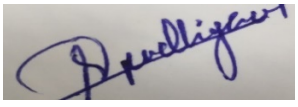

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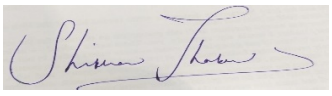

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